

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 ACDA-05 PC-01 NIC-01 /066 W

----- 050880

R 271350Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6532

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 1234

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: MRS. GANDHI ON THE DOMESTIC INDIAN SITUATION

1. IN THE FOUR MAJOR REPUBLIC DAY INTERVIEWS GIVEN TO INDIAN JOURNALS BY THE PRIME MINISTER (PRO-COMMUNIST "LINK", CONGRESS "SOCIALIST INDIA", PRO-CONGRESS "NATIONAL HERALD", INDEPENDENT "ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY"), SHE ELABORATES HER CASE AGAINST THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION TO HER AND TO THE CONGRESS PARTY.

2. THE OPPOSITION, SHE SAYS, IS "ANTI-DEMOCRATIC" BECAUSE IT ATTEMPTS TO OVERTHROW ELECTED MAJORITIES IN STATE LEGISLATURES. SHE ASKS WHETHER IT IS NOT "ANTI-SECULAR" AS WELL AND QUESTIONS WHETHER IT WOULD UPHOLD THE CONDITIONS OF

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN THE COUNTRY, NOTING THAT THE HINDU-NATIONALIST RSS (RASHTRIYA SEVAK SANGH) WAS AT THE HEART OF AGITATION IN MANY PLACES AND THAT THE RSS WAS ESSENTIALLY VIOLENT. SHE ASKS WHETHER THE OPPOSITION IS COMMITTED TO A FOREIGN POLICY OF "NON-ALIGNMENT". THOSE AGITATING AGAINST CONGRESS ARE LED BY EXTREME RIGHTISTS AND EXTREME LEFTISTS
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WHO HAVE NO SYMPATHY FOR DEMOCRACY AND NO PROGRAM EXCEPT TO

OPPOSE HER, SAID MRS. GANDHI. THIS IS WHY, SHE SAYS, THEY CAN BE DESCRIBED AS "FASCIST". SHE DRAWS A DIRECT ANALOGY WITH BOTH NAZI GERMANY AND FASCIST ITALY WHERE FALSE CRITICISMS, EXAGGERATIONS, REJECTION OF MAJORITY RULE AND REFUSAL TO AGREE TO "CONSENSUS" POLITICS UNDERMINED POPULAR CONFIDENCE IN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND LED TO THE FALL OF DEMOCRACY. THE OPPOSITIONS TACTICS ARE IN SUPPORT OF THOSE WHO WANT TO WEAKEN INDIA, WEAKEN DEMOCRACY, INCREASE VIOLENCE AND THREATEN THE CONSTITUTION.

3. RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS ON HER POSITIVE PROGRAMS, MRS. GANDHI WAS CAUTIOUS. SHE WARNED THAT FURTHER NATIONALIZATION OF INDUSTRIES SHOULD BE PURSUED ONLY WHEN A MOST THOROUGH PREPARATION HAD BEEN MADE AND SAID SHE FAVORED NATIONALIZATION ONLY WHEN CONDITIONS REQUIRZB IT AND IF IT WOULD IMPROVE THINGS. SOMETIMED NATIONALIZATION HAD ONLY INCREASED BUREAUCRATIZATION AND HINDERED PRODUCTION. SHE EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER SOME ELCTORAL REFORMS, DESIGNED TO ENABLE MORE POOR PEOPLE TO RUN FOR ELECTION AND TO REDUCE ELECTION EXPENSE UN BUT REJECTED ANY FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM. IN THE SAME WAY, WHE REJECTED ANY PROSPECT OF FUNDAMENTALLY REORGANIZING OR CHANGING THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY. IT HAD BEEN AND SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE A BROAD, "INCLUSIVE" ORGANIZATION ENCOMPASS NNG ALL REGIONS AND SECTIONS OF THE POPULATION RATHER THAN A SMALLER, TIGHTER PARTY.

4. COMMENT: THE P. M.'S POLITICAL TACTICS ARE TAKING INCREASINGLY CLEARER SHAPE: CONGRESS STANDS FOR STABILITY AND DEMOCRACY. THE SPLINTERED OPPOSITION VARIOUSLY FOR VIOLENCE, ANTI-DEMOCRATIC, ANTI-SOCIALIST AND RIGHT WING POLICIES, ALL NEGATIVELY ORIENTED AND GEARED TO OVERTHROW RATHER THAN REPLACE HER RULE WITH A VIALBE ALTERNATIVE. MRS. GANDHI IS SEIZING THE CENTER AND ATTEMPTING TO IDENTIFY THE OPPOSITION WITH POLITICAL EXTREMES. HER WARNING THAT THE OPPOSITION MAY BE "ANTI' SECULAR" IS AN APPEAL TO MUSLIMS AND THE BACKWARD CASTES AND A STROKE AGAINST THE JANA SANGH. AT THE SAME TIME SHE IS TAKING A CAREFUL "CENTRIST" POSITION ON ECONOMIC POLICY, PARTICULARLY ON AVOIDING NEW NATIONALIZATION (ESPECIALLY OF SUGAR, WHICH SHE SINGLES OUT IN ONE INTER-

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VIEW IN AN APPARENT NOD TO THE "MIDDLE PEASANTRY" OF NORTHERN AND WESTERN INDIAN WHICH PROVIDES AN IMPORTANT PILLAR OF SUPPORT FOR CONGRESS). IT IS, THUS FAR, A VERY DIFFERENT TYPE OF POLITICAL APPEAL THAN SHE WAS MAKING IN 1967-71, WHEN HER PROGRAM WAS EXTREMELY ACTIVIST, SOCIALIST AND REFORMIST. NOW SHE SEEMS TO BE BIDDING FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE PROPERTIED CLASSES IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS WHO STAND TO LOSE MOST FROM VIOLENCE AND DIS-

ORDER, WHILE TAKING FOR GRANTED THE SUPPORT OF THE POOREST
ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY, WHICH CONGRESS HAS ENJOYED SINCE
INDEPENDENCE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NATIONALIZATION, OPPOSITION PARTIES, POLITICAL SITUATION, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: johnsorg
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NEWDE01234
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750029-0839
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750118/aaaaapjx.tel
Line Count: 119
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: johnsorg
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 AUG 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <25 NOV 2003 by johnsorg>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MRS. GANDHI ON THE DOMESTIC INDIAN SITUATION
TAGS: PINT, IN, (GANDHI, INDIRA)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006